



April 14, 2021

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chairman
House Committee on Finance
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Director

Department of Health
Three Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908-5097

TTY: 711
www.health.ri.gov

RE: H 6122 - AN ACT MAKING APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE STATE FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2022 – ARTICLE 12 (MEDICAL ASSISTANCE) – SECTION 8 (RHODE ISLAND MEDICAID REFORM ACT OF 2008 RESOLUTION)

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing in support of Article 12 – Section 8, the Rhode Island Medicaid Reform Act of 2008 Resolution. Specifically, I am writing to support the Secretary of the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services' (EOHHS) request for approval of the following:

- **Perinatal Doula Services:** EOHHS proposes to establish medical assistance coverage and reimbursement rates for perinatal doula services, a practice to provide non-clinical emotional, physical, and informational support before, during, and after birth for expectant mothers, in order to reduce maternal health disparities; reduce the likelihood of costly interventions during births, such as cesarean birth; and epidural pain relief, while increasing the likelihood of a shorter labor, a spontaneous vaginal birth, and a positive childbirth experience.
- **Community Health Workers:** To improve health outcomes, increase access to care, and reduce healthcare costs, EOHHS proposes to provide medical assistance coverage and reimbursement to community health workers.
- **Expansion of First Connections Program.** In collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), EOHHS proposes to seek federal matching funds for the expansion of RIDOH's First Connections Program to serve women prenatally. First Connections is a risk assessment and response home visiting program designed to ensure that families are connected to appropriate services such as food assistance, mental health, childcare, long-term family home visiting, Early Intervention (EI), and other programs, at the earliest possible opportunity. EOHHS would establish medical assistance coverage and reimbursement rates for such First Connection services provided to prenatal women.
- **Parents as Teachers Program:** In collaboration with RIDOH, EOHHS proposes to seek federal matching funds for the coverage of the Parents as Teachers Program, to ensure that parents of young children are connected with the medical, social, and educational supports necessary to support their families.

Low-income women are at the highest risk of poor birth outcomes in the United States, and women of color, especially Black women, are especially vulnerable. Doula care, home visiting programs for pregnant women and families with young children, and community health worker services are among the most promising approaches to combating disparities in maternal health.

Women receiving such services have been found to have improved health outcomes for both themselves and their infants, including higher breastfeeding initiation rates, fewer low-birth weight babies, and lower rates of cesarean sections. Such services can also help reduce the impacts of racism and racial bias in healthcare for pregnant women of color by providing individually tailored, culturally appropriate, and patient-centered care and advocacy. It is for these reasons that I encourage your favorable consideration of these important maternal and child health initiatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole" followed by a stylized flourish. Below the signature, the word "for" is written in a smaller, cursive script.

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Director of Health

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House